

February 24, 2022

Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee
300 Capitol Ave, Ste. 5500
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Re: House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023 (Department of Developmental Services)

Good afternoon/evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Paul Bochicchio and I work at The Kennedy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget.

I have been employed by The Kennedy Center for six months and it's my truth this is the most amazing experience I've had in my 32 years of work experience. Being able to make a difference in the lives of those who have a disability, has truly given me purpose. I am the Manager of two-day programs named Prestige and Victory. My team and I create a six-hour workday experience for our individuals that includes morning meetings, reviewing what day, date, month, and year, we are currently in and including, sensory music, books, puzzles, games, arts and crafts, etc. My team and I assist our individuals with toileting throughout the day and make sure they are comfortable during their time at day program. The individuals bring their lunch to day program and enjoy snacks throughout their day program experience. My team and I also take our individuals out on community events i.e., shopping, coffee, hockey games, etc.

I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for community nonprofits that you fought to include in last year's budget. I'm here tonight to ask you to honor the long-term plan to address underfunding of community nonprofits and increase funding this year by an additional \$461 million, or 8% in total for FY23.

This funding is needed now more than ever. Without it, we risk destabilizing our state's community service delivery system which has been upended by the pressures of COVID-19 and an exponential increase in the need for service in our communities.

At the same time, we're facing unprecedented challenges recruiting and retaining staff of all skill levels and salaries.

Unfortunately, like most non-profit organizations in the State Of CT, the organization cannot pay staff the due salaries warranted for the dedication and selfless work we do daily.

Human services are now in competition with companies like Amazon and Walmart that require no specialized training, are paying more and offering more hiring incentives. Clinical staff are being lured away by lucrative offers from school districts and telehealth companies. Across the state, The Alliance found that 18%, nearly 1 in 5, nonprofit jobs are vacant right now.

At a recent town hall meeting held by The Kennedy Center, it was brought to my attention of the many attempts The Kennedy Center has made to detail the need for financial support from the State before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the lack of support has affected the

organization's ability to fill essential positions. These open positions affect the number of individuals we can place in our programs.

I am baffled at the fact, as essential workers who take care of the disabled members of our community, have not been included in receiving financial support in the "New Relief Fund". I would greatly appreciate your support and welcome the opportunity to share my experience, strength, and hope, with our State's legislative leaders or any support you think could help non-profit organizations like The Kennedy Center.

The increase in this year's budget, while very much appreciated, has quickly been absorbed by rising costs. Over the last year, inflation rose by almost six percent, surpassing the COLA in the current year's budget.

All costs to operate and run residential and day programs have increased. For example, like New York codes, rules and regulations, Section 86-2.9 – Adult day health care in residential/day programs health care facilities, applicable salary and non-salary operating costs, cost of transportation, and costs to run residential and day programs have increased.

Nonprofit Providers funded by the Department of Developmental Services are grateful for the efforts of the Appropriations Committee and Governor Lamont to address wage and funding issues specific to services for the Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities population. Last year's Group Home Settlement provided significant funding to increase the minimum wage for direct support staff in DDS agencies.

However, the group home settlement also created significant challenges:

1. First, the terms of the settlement provided wage increases of as much as 11.6% for entry level staff, which next year will increase to 14.5%. But the agreement only provides a 3% increase to everyone else. Staff who before July were making only slightly above the new minimum, often people who had years or decades of experience or managing other staff, found themselves suddenly paid almost the same as a new hire.
2. Second, the funding dedicated a pool of dollars to enhance employee benefits, but to date none of that funding has been disbursed to providers. We understand it to total less than half what providers have told DDS they would need.

Finally, please support please support the following proposals by Governor Lamont from the American Rescue Plan Act for DDS:

1. \$5 million in FY23 for infrastructure improvements for public and privately-owned camps.
2. \$5 million in FY23 to provide additional recreational and leisure opportunities to facilitate socialization and connections as the state emerges from the pandemic.

Thank you for your service and for the opportunity to share.

Sincerely,
Paul Boichichio, Day Program Manager
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